Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to you about the proposed Microsoft antitrust
settlement. I do not believe the company should be broken up,
but certain steps should be taken to make sure that neither
Microsoft (nor any other company) can hold people hostage to
their whims, and they should not be able to prevent other
people from expressing their thoughts or writing their own
software.

Microsoft should be able to add whatever it wants into its operating
system, and it should not have to disclose source code to anyone.

However, it should be forced to sell its OS at one price to anyone
who wants it, and once functionality is in the OS, it must not be
removed or downgraded. Microsoft should also be able to sell
"server" OSes for more money if they have more functionality, but
again the software should be available to anyone who wants it at
a single price.

The following two things are more general thoughts that apply to
Microsoft, but which can be abused by anyone. Their existence can
allow any software maker to exert too much control.

Another danger is the movement from single-time payments for software to
software rentals or "software as a service". Companies, including
Microsoft, should not be able to declare that their software is only
available for rental because that gives them too much power over
customers. They can shut off the software at any time. This is too
much power for something as essential as an OS, Microsoft should be
forced to sell the software at a reasonable price. (No more than
several times the yearly rental rate.)

Another weapon that Microsoft might be able to use is the software
patent. If software patents continue to exist and if Microsoft
gets their other avenues of control shut off, they may be able
to use patents to prevent people from writing software. If Microsoft
can get enough patents on core ideas, they can prevent smaller
companies from making competing software products. This is a
problem with the whole software patent system in that it is not

possible to make nontrivial software without violating some patents.
Thus, a small company that wants to make software cannot stop Microsoft
from stealing their ideas because Microsoft can hold patents on so
many core technologies that they can just shut down the little
company. Using software patents, a small company can make Microsoft stop
making a single product, but Microsoft can make a small company stop
producing its only product.

The only way software patents help the little guy is if the
little guy isn't making software. If he is merely getting patents
and then never doing the actual work of making software (since
software patents are just vague descriptions of software without the
actual work and details (source code) necessary to allow someone to
implement the algorithms) then he can drain money from
companies doing the actual work. However, this isn't the same thing
as making software.

It is my hope that implementing some or all of these ideas will keep
Microsoft from controlling too much of the software industry.

Sincerely,
John Arras